

# Responding to a Boil Water Notice: A Public Health Message

## Coliform Bacteria

## Fact Sheet for Public Facilities

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### **Coliform Bacteria**

Coliform bacteria may be found when drinking water is tested. This type of bacteria lives naturally in soil and also in the waste of warm-blooded animals. It can also grow as a film in water pipes. Most coliform are not harmful, but do indicate the possible presence of other disease-causing microbes (viruses, harmful bacteria and parasites) that are often found in soil and feces.

### **Health Effects Associated with Coliform Bacteria in Water**

Although coliform bacteria are not usually harmful, illness may be caused by other microbes in the water. Typical symptoms may include diarrhea, cramps, nausea or jaundice with headaches or fatigue. Please note that these symptoms may be caused by factors other than unsafe water. If people develop symptoms during a boil water notice, they should contact their physician right away.

### **General Advice for All Public Facilities**

- ✓ Inform the public (staff, students and patients) by posting the DNR notice (available from local DNR offices) at faucets and in other prominent locations instructing the public not to drink the water or use it for mixing baby formula.
- ✓ Turn off drinking fountains
- ✓ Dump ice if it was made on-site, purchase ice from a safe source, clean and sanitize ice machines after “all clear” has been issued
- ✓ Provide SAFE water (see below) for drinking and preparing food, juice, other beverages and ice.
  - ◆ Commercially bottled water
  - ◆ Packaged ice from an approved source
  - ◆ Water that has been at a rolling boil for 1 minute (CDC – Centers for Disease Control). Although boiling will make water safe, the high volume of water used by public facilities may make it impractical to depend on boiled water to replace tap water.
  - ◆ A public water supply system that is in compliance. Please note that the transport vessel, whether it is a gallon jug or a tanker truck, must be clean and sanitized before filling with water in order to keep the water safe to drink.

### **Hospitals, Dental and other Health Care Facilities**

- ✓ Follow the section on General Advice for all Public Facilities.
- ✓ All health care facilities should use sterile water for flushing wounds, bottled water for surgical scrub, tube feeding, washing newborns, etc.
- ✓ Dentists and dental hygienists discontinue use of water cooled instruments such as high-speed handpieces, air/water syringes, and cavitrons; substitute bottled water applied with a bulb syringe for cooling and rinsing purposes; use rubber dams as appropriate; defer treatment for patients who may be at risk, such as small children, the elderly, and those with chronic diseases or suppressed immune systems.

### **Hotels/Motels**

- ✓ Follow the section on General Advice for All Public Facilities
- ✓ Post signs in guest rooms that instruct the public not to drink water or use it for making coffee, brushing teeth, making baby formula or bathing infants

### **Food Service, Food Preparation Facilities**

- ✓ Follow the section on General Advice for All Public Facilities.
- ✓ Use only commercially bottled water for ingestion, washing ready to eat foods such as fruit and vegetables, making coffee, cooking, reconstituting juices, carbonated beverages or other drinks and any other use, which might result in the ingestion of unboiled tap water.
- ✓ Turn off all post-mix beverage machines, dump premixed beverages on hands such as juice, lemonade, coffee, soda, ice tea, etc.
- ✓ Turn off beverage vending machines using contaminated water supply
- ✓ Wash utensils either manually or with a dishwasher. Be sure the final rinse of the dishes is done with the proper strength of sanitizer, a bleach solution (one tablespoon of bleach in 2 gallons of cool water) or using 180-degree water.
- ✓ Thoroughly wash hands as usual. Wear gloves after hand washing and prior to handling ready to eat foods.

These procedures must remain in effect until the municipality issues the “all clear” or your private well tests safe. After you are notified that the water is safe, clean and sanitize the ice machine, beverage machines and any other piece of equipment that uses tap water prior to using.

### **Follow-up Sampling and Cleaning of Wells (for facilities on a private well)**

- ✓ Work with your well contractor to investigate and clean the water system
- ✓ Work with your local DNR representative to collect necessary follow-up samples

### **Municipal Water Users**

- ✓ If your well is part of a large public system, such as a municipal or subdivision, wait until notified by your system official before resuming normal use of the water.

### **For More Information, Contact:**

- ✓ Your Local Public Health Department: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/>
- ✓ Your licensing inspector.
- ✓ Your water utility operator for information specific to a municipal water problem.
- ✓ Wisconsin Division of Public Health, Regional Office  
<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/counties/regional.htm>
- ✓ Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services  
<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/hometips/dhp/water.htm>
- ✓ Wisconsin Dept of Natural Resources, Regional Drinking Water Office or  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/dwg/>
- ✓ If there is a public health emergency, call the DHFS 24-hour Hotline at 608-258-0099.